



BRIAN E. FROSH, MARYLAND ATTORNEY GENERAL

# PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
March 5, 2021

Media Contacts:  
[press@oag.state.md.us](mailto:press@oag.state.md.us)  
410-576-7009

## Attorney General Frosh Defends Age and Background Check Requirements for Semiautomatic Assault Rifle Sales

**BALTIMORE, MD (March 5, 2021)** – Maryland Attorney General Brian E. Frosh today joined a bipartisan coalition of 19 attorneys general in filing an [amicus brief](#) in support of a Washington state initiative regulating the sale of semiautomatic assault rifles.

The coalition filed the brief in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit in support of Washington in *Mitchell v. Atkins*. The attorneys general argue that states have the right to enact reasonable firearm regulations that protect public safety and reduce the prevalence of gun violence. The coalition argues that this includes passing regulations to ensure that only individuals who are likely to use firearms responsibly are able to access them.

“Semiautomatic assault rifles are deadly combat weapons intended to fire multiple rounds of ammunition in a short amount of time,” said Attorney General Frosh. “Maryland has enacted reasonable, common sense gun laws. I am committed to defending states’ authority to protect public safety and reduce the risk of deadly gun violence.”

In 2018, the people of Washington passed Initiative Measure No. 1639, which imposed new rules on sales of semiautomatic assault rifles, including an age requirement on semiautomatic assault rifle sales, a requirement that local law enforcement agencies conduct enhanced background checks on prospective purchasers, and a prohibition on the in-person sales of semiautomatic assault rifles to nonresidents. In 2019, a group of firearms dealers and prospective purchasers who did not meet the age requirement filed a lawsuit, alleging that Washington’s measure infringed on their Second Amendment rights and violated the dormant Commerce Clause. The district court ruled against the plaintiffs, and they appealed to the Ninth Circuit.

In the brief, the coalition argues that states have the responsibility and power to protect their residents by promoting safety, preventing crime, and minimizing gun violence. Additionally, states can enact specific regulations that are best tailored to their residents’ needs. These regulations include restrictions that prohibit the sale of firearms based on the purchaser’s age,

which are found in all 50 states. For example, In Maryland, anyone who is under the age of 21 is prohibited from possessing, purchasing, renting, or transferring a regulated firearm. Restrictions of this kind have repeatedly been upheld by courts throughout the country as a way to deter crime and promote public safety.

The coalition also argues that states can also permissibly promote public safety by restricting in-person sales of firearms to state residents, as Washington has. Restricting the in-person sales of semiautomatic assault rifles to state residents allows states to conduct more robust background checks on those who purchase weapons, and better ensure that only individuals who are likely to use firearms responsibly can use them. Congress already has enacted an identical measure with respect to handguns, limiting the in-person sales of all handguns to the residents of a dealer's home state. The attorneys general point out that Washington's initiative merely extends that rule to the sale of semiautomatic assault rifles.

Joining Attorney General Frosh in filing the brief are the attorneys general of California, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Virginia.

[www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/press/2021/030521.pdf](http://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/press/2021/030521.pdf)